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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0427  
INFO WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 001606

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS  
DEPT FOR CA/FPP

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [CVIS](#) [KFRD](#) [ASEC](#) [SMIG](#) [DR](#)  
SUBJECT: FOR RELEASE: Fraud Prevention Initiatives Against  
Visa-Fixers

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 001235

1) (U) Summary: As detailed in post's most recent consular fraud summary (see ref), the level of fraud at post is extremely high and post is beset by the operations of visa-fixers. "Buscones," as visa-fixers are known locally, may impersonate consular officials and often operate in the vicinity of the consular section. Two recent initiatives at post address these problems: first the Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU) updated a "Buscones" poster identifying persons known to impersonate consular employees; secondly the ARSO-I in coordination with local police intensified regular operations against buscones working in the immediate vicinity of the consular section. End Summary.

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"Buscones" Poster  
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2) (U) Our "Buscones" poster contains the names and photos of 50 local individuals known to have impersonated U.S. Embassy officials and/or employees in order to defraud prospective visa applicants. The poster simply states, "These persons are not employees of the American Embassy" and provides FPU contact information. We display it prominently in our consular waiting areas and have distributed approximately 50 copies to various GODR offices including the National Police (PN) Anti-Fraud Unit and public prosecutors' offices. FPU and ARSO-I personnel conducting investigations and local officials taking complaints from victims of fraud regularly use the poster to assist in identification of buscones. Although we never officially released it to the public, the poster received front-page coverage in the local press. The media attention generated many calls to consular and local officials from victims of consular-related fraud. In response the PN officer assigned to the consular section (reftel explains this placement) has guided these callers through the process of filing criminal complaints ("denuncias") in order to facilitate the subsequent arrest of several buscones. The arrests publicly demonstrate the serious consequences of fraud and misrepresentation and have increased the local awareness level of the buscones' con game.

3) (SBU) The case of one particular impersonator demonstrates how much is at stake for buscones and their victims. Elsy Gertrudis Gonzalez Cavallo claimed to be a consular section employee promising several visa applicants that she could assist them in obtaining a visa. Multiple complaints were filed against her with visa applicants defrauded of as much as \$15,000 USD. Based on these "denuncias" Dominican authorities obtained a warrant and

recently arrested her. She is currently incarcerated, serving one month in preventative custody while the case against her is developed. The FPU and ARSO-I have long known of Gonzalez Cavallo's activities and facilitated her arrest once before. In that instance she used her influence to arrange for release from custody even before arriving at the police station for processing. The drastically different results of her most recent arrest reflect the success of ARSO-I efforts to cultivate good working relations with local prosecutors, and furthermore confirm the advantage of developing solid cases with multiple complaints.

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Push-Back Operations  
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4) (U) Visa-fixers operate openly on the streets bordering our consular section, selling fake documents and visa packets as well as victimizing unwary applicants. Buscones often convince legitimate applicants of the need for additional forms or "corrections" to their applications offering to "assist" (and often defrauding) them at inflated prices. To confront this situation we designed a push-back operation, to improve safety on the streets in

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front of the consular section by clearing an area beyond the actual waiting line. National Police assigned to crowd control at our facility ordered all non-applicants back an additional 20 meters, thus allowing applicants to get legitimate information from consular personnel and to get documents in order without being accosted by aggressive visa-fixers.

5) (U) On the morning of November 16, the Anti-Fraud Department of the National Police (PN) carried out an aggressive operation against buscones working in the vicinity of the Consular Section. The PN arrested nine, and impounded one mobile bus set up with computers, internet access, photo services, etc. used to facilitate their activities. A similar operation on November 24 resulted in the arrest of four visa-fixers. Although all of those arrested were released within 24 hours after routine processing, the operations have had a noticeable effect in pushing the buscones activities further back from the consular section. The ARSO-I remains in continuous coordination with PN authorities to arrest and prosecute these visa-fixers as future opportunities arise.

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Teamwork and Strategy Pay Off  
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6) (U) We are fortunate to have an outstanding consular team working cooperatively with the FPU and ARSO-I to employ creative, outside-of-the-box thinking and tactics in the pursuit of mala fide applicants and visa fixers. These recent arrests showcase success of the team's hard work. Septel will follow detailing further public outreach efforts to inform visa applicants and discourage them from turning to buscones for assistance. Additional arrests and local prosecution of persons involved in consular fraud will also be reported septel.

LAMBERT  
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